

RESEARCH REPORT

Catalog number	99-008
Date:	July 7, 1999
Subject:	Feasibility of Sheriff's Office Assumption of Indigent Burial Responsibilities
To:	David Smith, County Administrative Officer
From:	Sandi Wilson, Deputy County Administrator <i>Sandi Wilson</i> Christopher Bradley, Budget Manager
Prepared By:	Suzanne R. Ashmore, Budget Analyst

Issue:

Would it be feasible for the Sheriff's Office to assume responsibilities for the Indigent Burial process that are now being handled by Facilities Management?

Background:

In accordance with Arizona Revised Statute ARS §36-831, the County in which death occurs is responsible for the funeral and disposition arrangements of the indigent deceased. The Public Fiduciary's Office determines eligibility for County burial using established criteria. Not every case presented for public burial is accepted. Refusals during FY 98-99 occurred at a ratio slightly over 1:1. Meaning that for every application submitted, one was refused for ineligibility.

Although the Public Fiduciary's Office is the official administrator for the indigent burial program, several Maricopa County departments are involved: Medical Examiner, Facilities Management, Sheriff's Office, Finance, and the Office of Management and Budget. Attachment A to this document lists duties performed by these departments as they pertain to indigent burial and includes flow charts for the departments most involved—Facilities Management and Public Fiduciary's Office. It should be noted that Facilities Management currently handles a significant amount of administrative detail.

Maricopa County's four-year annual average for indigent burials is 297 per year.

Year	Indigent Burials	Source
1995-96	313	Public Fiduciary's Office
1996-97	278	" " "
1997-98	294	" " "
1998-99	305	" " "

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Burials take place once weekly on Thursday mornings barring inclement (wet) weather or equipment failure. Simply stated, there is an average of five (5) burials per week. In reality the number of burials per week varies, often significantly.

The assumptions on which this study is based include the following:

- a) The law concerning burial of indigents does not specify aesthetics of burial grounds.
- b) Accurate records pertaining to specific names and location of bodies are critical.
- c) Burial grounds contain a finite amount of space and it is essential that graves be established and bodies be buried according to specification for efficiency and public health reasons.
- d) County operations should serve citizens through collaborative, efficient, and cost-effective work processes that are responsive and fiscally prudent.

In recent years, Facilities Management and the Sheriff's Office have been jointly involved with indigent burial. These two departments began a dialogue over a year ago regarding the possibility of the Sheriff's Office assuming the Facilities Management portion of indigent burial.

Sheriff's Office employees understood that a costly grounds maintenance contract for the cemeteries (thousands of dollars per year) was being upheld by the County and its observation was that the contract was not being fulfilled. The Sheriff's Department was certain that inmate laborers could do a better job at grounds maintenance at the County's two indigent cemeteries. This would result in substantial savings to the County and further the inmate work program.

A second understanding held by Sheriff's Office employees interviewed was that the County had considered contracting out the entire portion of indigent burial and cemetery maintenance currently being accomplished by the Sheriff's Office and Facilities Management. If this was indeed the case, then the Sheriff's Office would be interested in handling the entire process.

In Spring 1999, the Contracts Assistant (QA--quality assurance) employee from Facilities Management who handles the indigent burial responsibilities was out on disability. This and other circumstances interrupted the flow in the routine and resulted in a couple cancellations of the weekly (Thursday) burials. When cancellations occur, bodies are held by the mortuaries and interred the following Thursday. The effects of the disruption in the routine increased the Sheriff's Office interest in taking over the process. It was believed that the entire operation would go smoother with less chance for error if only one unit was responsible for all of the cemetery activity. It was even suggested that perhaps burials could occur more frequently.

The budget analyst assigned to this project observed the burial process at the White Tanks cemetery and toured the Tempe Buttes cemetery to assess maintenance and upkeep.

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Discussion:

Issues

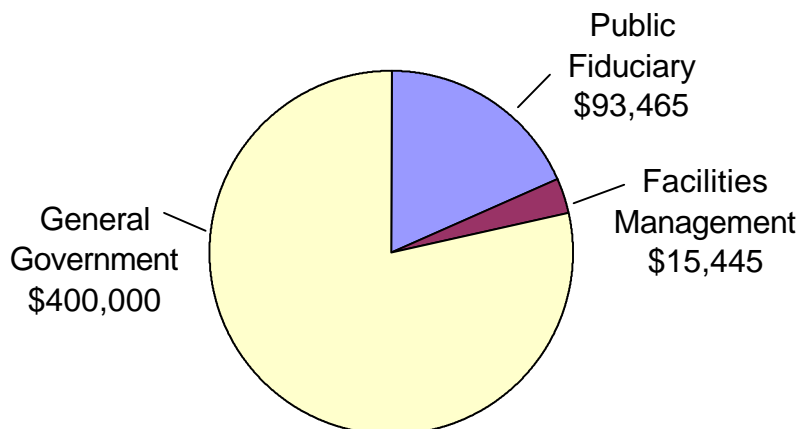
The study revealed that specific items of concern initiating the discussion of takeover of the indigent burial process from Facilities Management by the Sheriff's Department may no longer be issues. The former costly cemetery maintenance contract is now a service that is contracted out on an "as needed" basis resulting in an annual expenditure of less than \$1,000 for FY 1999. No evidence was found to support the premise that the draft bid specification document for contracting out burial process and cemetery upkeep was under consideration.

Costs and Funding

The average cost for a single adult interment is \$639. This amount is for the following items: a) Mortuary Fee--\$ 480; b) Grave Liner--\$ 147; and c) Grave Marker--\$ 12.

There are additional costs associated with a public indigent burial program. In Maricopa County, these are spread among the General Government, Public Fiduciary and the Facilities Management budgets.

**Indigent Burial Budget Allocation
FY 1999-00**



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Typical Expenses by Source of Funds

Fund Source	Budget	Description
General Government	\$400,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mortuary Expenses • Grave Liners and Markers • Cemetery Equipment
Public Fiduciary	\$93,465	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salaries (2 Coordinators) • Space Rental
Facilities Management*	\$15,445	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salaries • Utilities • Grounds Maintenance • Outhouse Contract

*Additional information on these amounts can be found on Attachment B.

Record Keeping

Several categories of records retained by the Public Fiduciary's Office were the same as those maintained by Facilities Management. Both of these offices receive requests concerning burial location. The automated records at Facilities Management go back further than those at Public Fiduciary. Facilities Management is the official records repository and has access to records from the present back 40+ years. There may be some benefit to a shared software program between departments involved with this process. Although updating and streamlining the record system was not studied in this report, there were indications that benefits could be realized through minimizing duplication of effort.

Equipment

There are two backhoes at the cemetery. One is a loaner belonging to MCDOT; the other one is older and will be replaced by Equipment Services and funded through general government.

Personnel

There are currently two individuals from Facilities Management who are skilled at operating the backhoe, communicating with morticians, and managing all of the records associated with indigent burial. A Sheriff's Department employee has been recently receiving training in operating the backhoe. The supervisor of the two individuals from Facilities Management is the liaison for ordering graveyard supplies funding by general government. Time allotted to this activity is minimal.

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Conclusion:

For all practical purposes, the Maricopa County indigent burial operation is functional. Cooperation is taking place between County departments, indigents are being buried efficiently and with dignity, and the cemeteries are in acceptable condition.

The prospect of using inmate laborers for cemetery maintenance is one worth pursuing whether or not Facilities Management remains involved in indigent burials. The existing contract would need to be amended.

A clear business case for the Sheriff's Office taking over the operation never became evident. In viewing Attachment A, it became obvious that minimum process efficiencies would be realized with this transition. The Public Fiduciary's Office would have one contact instead of two regarding weekly burial schedule. Savings: \$3.00 per week; \$156 per year. One burial event per week, on the same day is most efficient for the County. The few instances of Thursday burial post-ponements might be ameliorated by the Sheriff's Office handling the entire operation; however, this would not incur any cost savings for the County.

Transition costs for the Sheriff's Office to take over Facilities Management role—assuming the process stayed the same--would be approximately: \$3,265 at most.

Training on backhoe operations is currently taking place.

Amount/Description

\$ 313 Training: in-office paperwork/record keeping processes at office (24 hrs.)

\$ 313 Training: at-cemetery paperwork/record keeping processes (24 hrs.)

\$ 83 Training on other clerical related duties (8 hrs.)

\$ 156 Setting up of computer system and software (12 hrs.)

\$ 100 Updating signage outside the cemeteries

\$2,000 Computer and software*

\$ 300 Printer

\$3,265

*Facilities Management has offered the existing computer.

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What did become evident was that the County might be better served if streamlining occurred and the administrative responsibilities for records maintenance/retention and budgetary/fiscal agent responsibilities rested within one department, and the physical responsibilities of burial and cemetery maintenance rested with another. This would result in the following:

- Isolation of physical burial process and cemetery maintenance to one department, rather than two
- Elimination of the involvement of two departments
- Improvement in customer service with a one-stop call concerning records (customers now call either Public Fiduciary, Facilities Management or both)
- Elimination of confusion regarding responsibility
- Delineation of process "ownership" resulting in the flexibility to run an efficient and effective process

See Attachment C for possible allocation of responsibilities.

Again, the minimum requirements for indigent burial are currently being met. The budget for these operations is expected to remain flat.

Recommendation:

Based on the preceding conclusions, OMB recommends the following options be considered:

Option 1:

That because no clear business case became apparent and because the operations are adequate, that Facilities Management and the Sheriff's Office continue to share responsibilities with one change:

That Facilities Management and the Sheriff's Office coordinate changing the landscape maintenance arrangements for the Sheriff's Office to take over landscape maintenance using inmate labor.

Anticipated savings from the first year can be used to purchase appropriate tools and the County will later realize a savings of \$660 or more a year.

Option 2:

That the County consolidate its indigent burial administration by allocating records maintenance/retention, budgetary/ fiscal agent, burial and cemetery maintenance to two departments (see Attachment C for possible allocation of responsibilities).

AND

That the Indigent Burial budget be moved from General Government to either Public Fiduciary or the Sheriff's Office.

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AND

That any budget adjustments (using Attachment B as a guide) be postponed until the FY2001 budget cycle.

Option 3:

That budgetary and fiscal responsibilities for indigent burial remain in General Government with the Sheriff's Office assuming current Facilities Management responsibilities. Appropriate training would be provided by Facilities Management for the transition. The first year's savings on landscape maintenance be used to purchase tools for the inmates to maintain the cemeteries.

AND

That any budget adjustments (using Attachment B as a guide) be postponed until the FY2001 budget cycle.

General Process Improvement Recommendations:

During the study some potential process improvement items came to light. Regardless of which option is selected, consideration should be given to eliminate the cemetery grounds maintenance contract. A savings of \$660 or more would be incurred.

If Option 1 is selected, communication between Facilities Management and the Sheriff's Office could be increased. For instance, have Facilities Management automatically forward communication from Public Fiduciary regarding that week's burials with the Sheriff's Office so the Sheriff's Office does not need to contact Public Fiduciary.

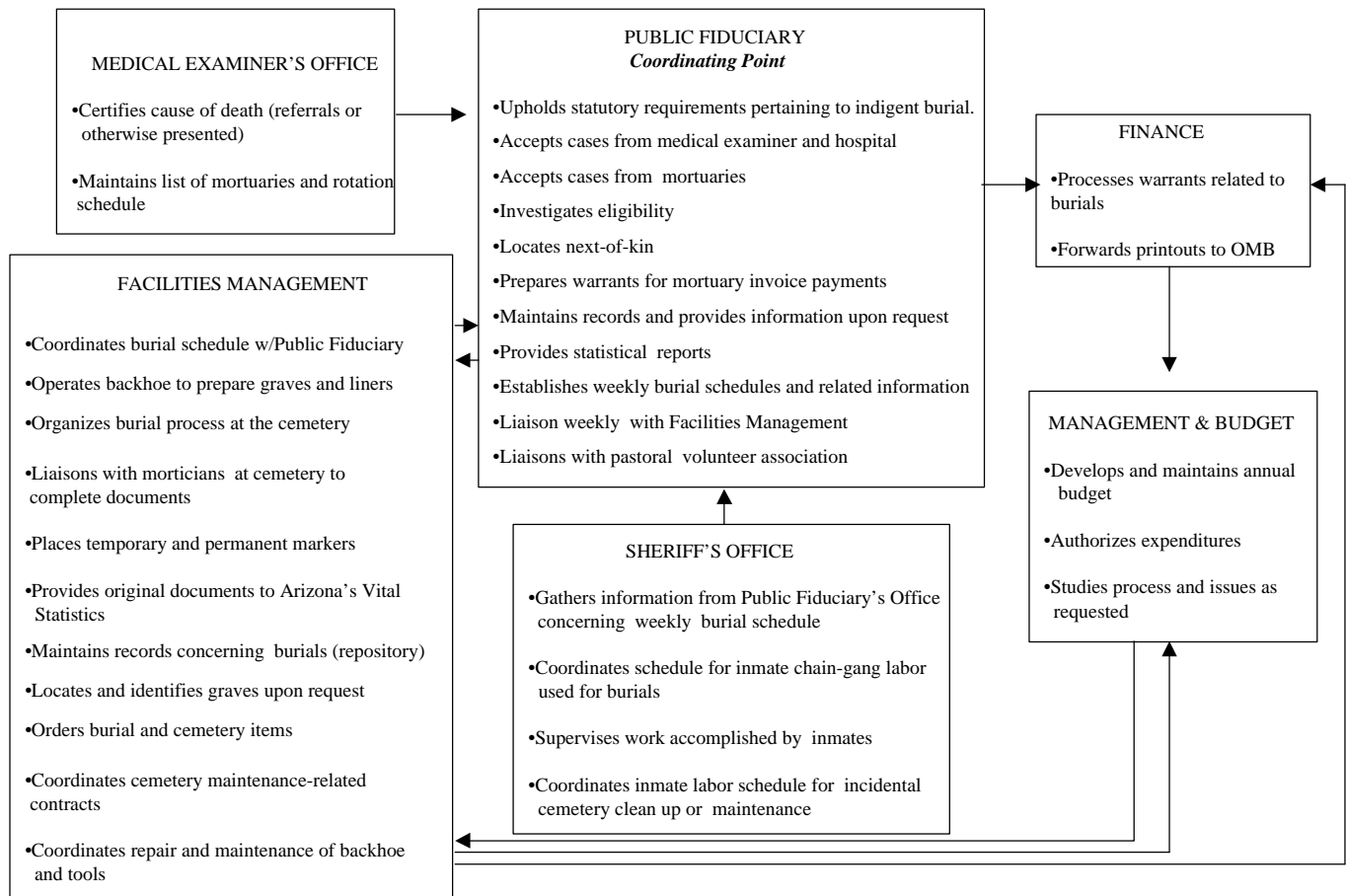
If Option 1 or Option 3 is selected, more sharing of information and possibly filing systems could occur between the Public Fiduciary's Office and the County department designated official repository of indigent burial information to minimize duplication of effort. Consideration should be given to upgrading the records management system.

The Office of Management and Budget recommends the adoption of Option 2 with a proviso that the three departments involved (Facilities Management, Public Fiduciary, and the Sheriff's Office) convene and make recommendations by October 31, 1999 regarding implementation of this option beginning with FY 2000-01.

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**MARICOPA COUNTY
INDIGENT BURIALS
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL INVOLVEMENT
JUNE 1999**

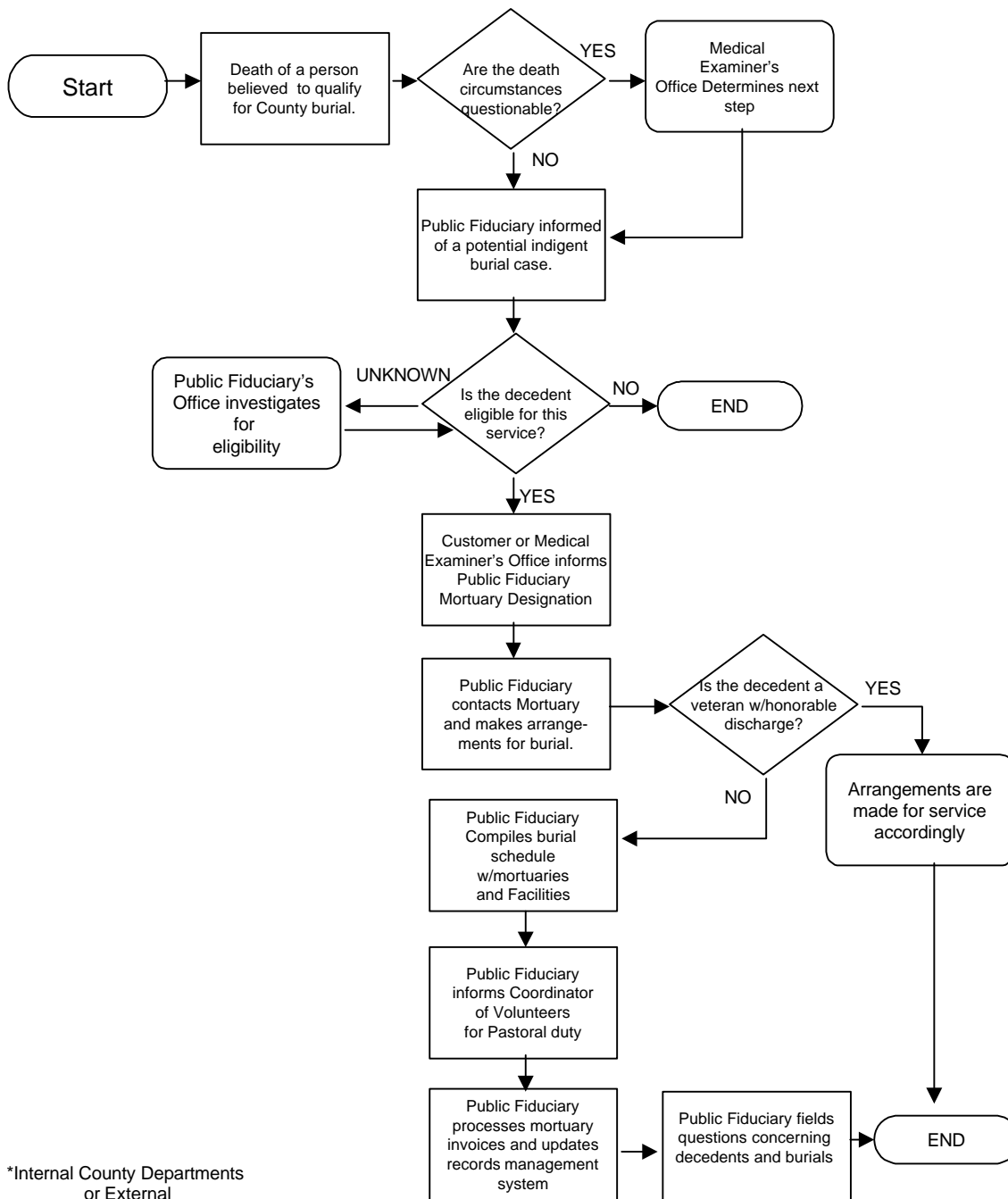
Attachment A



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PUBLIC FIDUCIARY Indigent Burials June 1999

Attachment A (1)



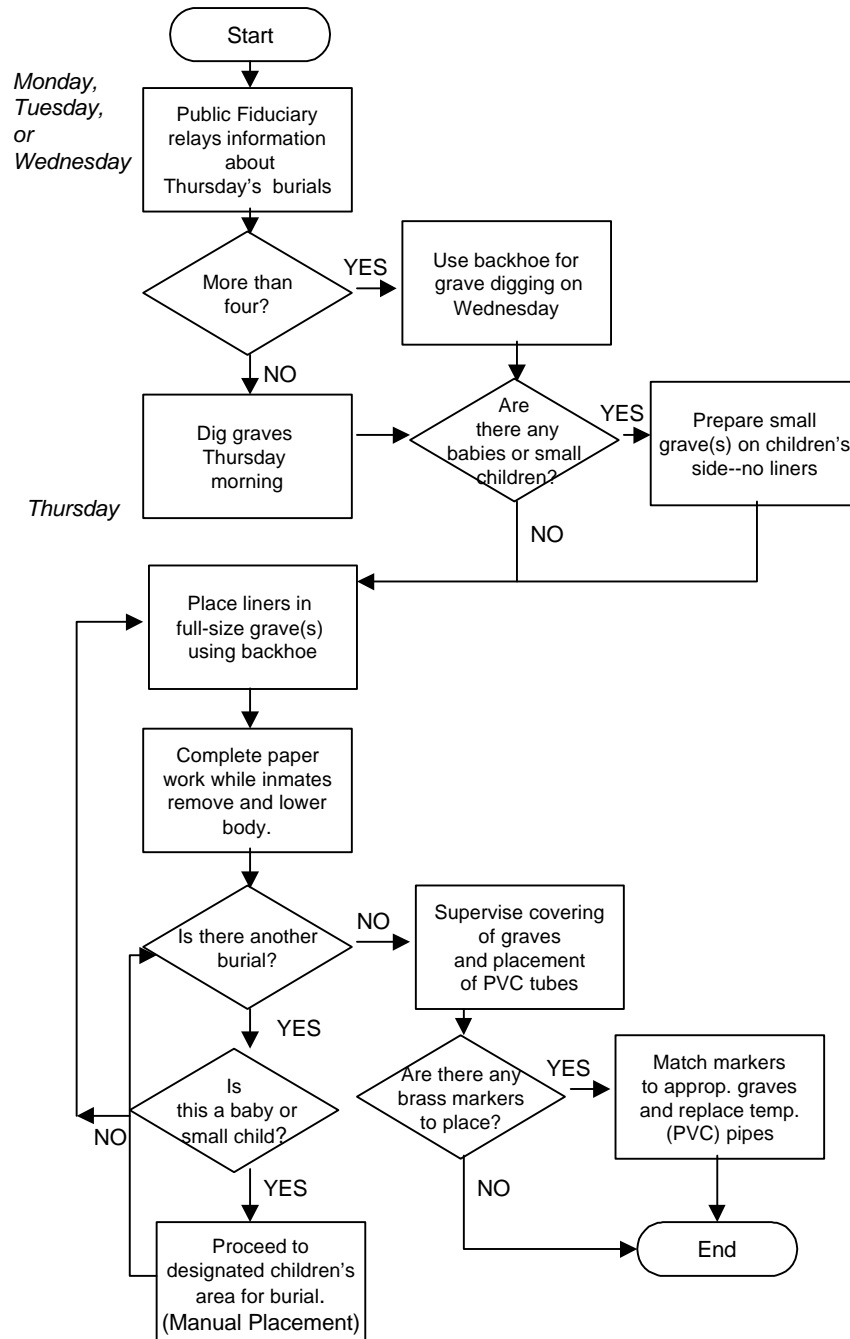
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Attachment A (2)

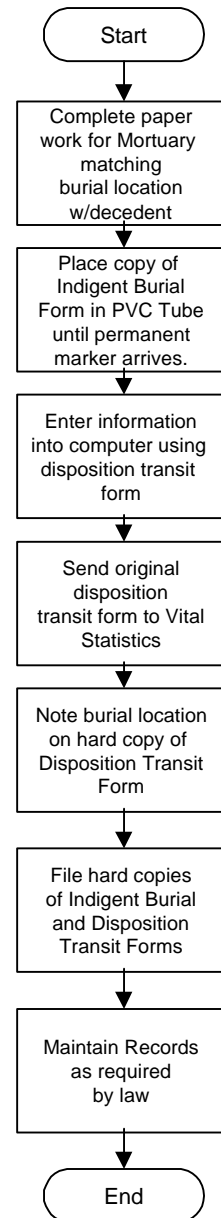
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Indigent Burials June 1999

A. Interment



B. Record Keeping



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Attachment B

June 30, 1999

INDIGENT BURIAL PROCESS (Costs Borne by Facilities Management)

TOTAL: **\$ 15,445**

PERSONAL SERVICES **\$13,509**

.4 FTE @\$13.08/hr or \$27,206.40/annually. (Backhoe operation and maint., record keeping, marker placement, locating graves upon request.)
\$13,238 (\$10,882.56/sal + \$2,355.12/ben.)

.01 FTE @ \$10.47/hr or \$21,777.60/annually. (payment processing for commodities and services)
\$ 271 (\$217.78/sal + \$52.88/ben.)

UTILITIES \$602/annually

Electric available at cemetery, but not used. APS, Acct. #1050585 –001-2.
Currently billed for minimum amount \$13.25 Monthly Avg.

Water & Sewer (Adaman Mutual Water Co., Acct.# 1555- \$37 monthly Avg.

CEMETERY MAINTENANCE \$660

Contracted as needed @\$15 hr. approximately \$660 per year.
(Waste Hauling, Shrubbery Trimming, Tree Removal [if needed at Tempe Buttes])

OTHER \$674

Waste Contract (BS95265)/Porta Potty)

Shed and fence maintenance as needed.

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**MARICOPA COUNTY
INDIGENT BURIALS**

**OPTION 2
JUNE 1999**

Attachment C

